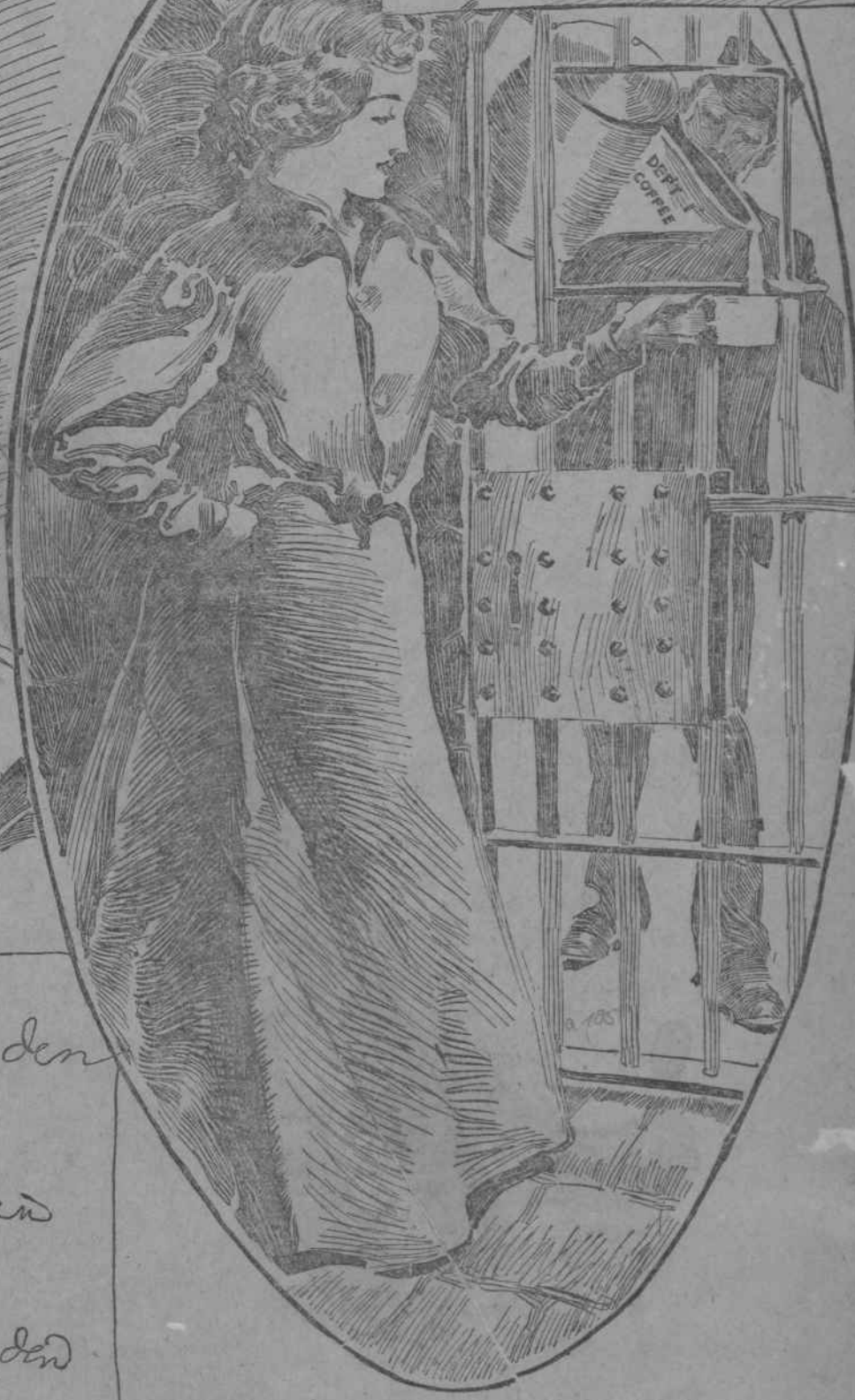


Gov. Atkinson's Wife, Now on Trial for the Crime of Forgery, Is Convicted, Will He Pardon Her?

LOVE OR DUTY?

MOST DISTRESSING PERPLEXITY THAT EVER CONFRONTED A PUBLIC OFFICIAL.

Or Will the Governor of West Virginia See His Young Bride Pass from the Executive Mansion to the State Prison?



G. D. Camden
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GOV. ATKINSON'S YOUNG BRIDE AT THE EXECUTIVE MANSION.

JUDGE CAMDEN'S SIGNATURES.

THE ALLEGED FORGERIES.

IF CONVICTED, WILL GOV. ATKINSON SAVE HER FROM THIS?

AS this page of the Magazine Supplement goes to press Governor Atkinson, the chief executive of West Virginia, finds himself confronted by the most distressing perplexity that the human mind can imagine.

Governor Atkinson may at any hour be called upon to decide between Love and Duty—to determine whether his young bride shall be taken from the Executive Mansion to the State prison, or whether he will exercise the pardoning power in defiance of his oath of office and overthrow the efforts of justice.

Mrs. Myra H. Atkinson, wife of the Governor of West Virginia, is on trial, accused of forgery, in the State of which her husband is Chief Executive.

No novelist ever found or imagined a more thrilling human problem than this case presents. It possesses at the same time strikingly dramatic features and others of the most complex psychological interest.

The scene of the trial is the little Court House of Glenville, W. Va., where the Circuit Court of Gilmer County is held. The Judge bears the picturesque name of Bilzard.

Should a conviction result the situation will be an extraordinary one. Nothing quite like it has, it is believed, ever been known in American history.

The punishment for forgery is, of course, a long term of imprisonment. A person convicted of the crime charged against Mrs. Atkinson may be sent to jail for five years.

When the sentence is imposed and confirmed by the highest court to which an appeal may be taken, there is only one power that can save the prisoner from jail. That is the power of the Governor.

If Mrs. Atkinson shall be convicted, it will lie with her husband to say whether she shall go to jail or not.

It is impossible to conceive, in our modern civilization, a situation more cruel than that of Governor Atkinson. Try to realize the position in which he may find himself and all the agonies which he is no doubt suffering by anticipation.

Here is a man newly married to a wife whom he devotedly loves, and it rests with him solely to say whether her life shall be wrecked by a long term of imprisonment or not. He has but to order the brief form of pardon to be prepared, to sign his name to it and she is free. No legal power in the land can reverse his action, once taken.

His wife is a woman of beauty, wealth, education and refinement. She is the social leader of her State. Shall she be torn from her surroundings and thrust into jail with criminals of the vilest description, with the consent of the husband who loves her?

The Governor is self-made and an ambitious man. His wife, who is both clever and handsome, has been of great service to him. She has been devoted to him. Shall he desert her?

He stands indeed betwixt love and duty. The power of pardoning

criminals is one of the greatest which the people confer on the Governor, and the law requires that it shall be exercised with extreme caution. He may only grant pardons in cases where facts which had not been presented to the court, or were not admissible as evidence, and which greatly modify the guilt of the prisoner, are laid before him.

Mrs. Atkinson is accused of forging the name of her late husband, Judge Camden. She was at the time a rich woman. It will hardly appear, therefore, that there can be any extenuating circumstances.

But her husband's position must be considered. Some allowance is to be made for human nature. The American people never expect it to be suppressed altogether.

The sentimental balance of Governor Atkinson's nature seems to be indicated by his action in the Kimes case, in which he said, in effect, that the husband who did not kill the disturber of his domestic peace was culpable.

What will Governor Atkinson do? That is the question which West Virginia and the rest of the country will await with breathless interest.

The events which have led up to this extraordinary climax may now be related.

Governor George Wesley Atkinson was married on June 24 to Mrs. Myra H. Camden. She was already under indictment for forging the name of her husband, the late Judge Camden.

The specific acts charged against Mrs. Atkinson are the forgery of the name of the late Judge G. D. Camden to two receipts given to J. P. Owens and to two memoranda concerning the sale of land to Owens by Judge Camden. The receipts were signed "G. D. Camden, for Mrs. G. D. Camden," and the defence is that Judge Camden was ill, and that Mrs. Camden, now Mrs. Atkinson, was authorized to sign the papers.

Even before her indictment Mrs. Atkinson was the most remarkable woman in West Virginia. The Governor is her third husband.

As a poor and obscure girl she married in 1875 Dr. Edward Davis, a man of prominent family. He drank lye for whiskey one dark night and died.

In 1882 the widow married Judge Gideon Draper Camden, the most prominent and wealthiest member of the famous Camden family, that numbers Senators, Governors and millionaires in its list of notables. She was then thirty-eight, handsome, vivacious and lively; just the sort of woman to attract a millionaire widower of seventy-five; and that he was attracted and that the widow was not without business sense, are proved by a marriage contract that gave her \$100,000 for marrying him and caring for him in his old age and also by the will that gave her all of his estate except a few \$500 legacies he left to his children and grandchildren.

A formal protest against the probating of the will was filed by Martha M. Sommers, Dora E. Ramsburg, daughters of the deceased; Wilson Camden, his grandson, and Genevieve Bogges, his granddaughter, children of a deceased son and daughter of the Judge. This protest was filed by their attorney, Mr. Nathan Goff, now Judge of the United States Circuit Court. After a hearing the Court ordered that the instrument in question should be recorded "as the true last will and testament of G. D. Camden, deceased."

But subsequent litigation resulted in a compromise, whereby the widow was to receive \$108,000.

When the children of the Judge regained possession of the estate they discovered there had been considerable waste in the outlying lands. One Joshua P. Owens, of Gilmer County, they discovered had stripped the timber from a valuable tract and sold it to Scott Withers. The Camden heirs then began suit against Withers for the money and against Owens for trespass.

In answer Owens filed four receipts for money in the handwriting of Myra H. Camden, aggregating about \$1,800, in full payment for 213 acres, the land on which he had cut timber.

The four receipts bore the respective dates 1883, 1884, 1885 and 1886, but a careful examination of the late Judge Camden's papers disclosed no memorandum of such sale, nor did his bank books indicate the receipt of any such sums of money. Letters from Owens to Camden were, it is alleged, discovered, dated 1886, and subsequent to the receipts mentioned in which Owens disclaimed any title to the land.

An expert examination of the receipts filed by Owens disclosed, it is claimed, that although they purported to be written at different times, embracing a period of four years, two of them had in reality been written on two pieces of the same sheet of paper and at the same time.

Judge Camden's children and grandchildren then laid the matter before the Grand Jury, and the indictment of Mrs. Atkinson followed.

The trial of Mrs. Atkinson began on Monday and the most intense interest has centred in the little courtroom of Glenville, in which the latter said that he had just returned from Mrs. Camden's home at Clarksburg, and had fully arranged matters with regard to his land, and that Mrs. Camden had given him a receipt far in excess of the purchase price of the land. These are the receipts that are alleged to have been forged by Mrs. Atkinson and Owens.

Other witnesses corroborated Norris's testimony by detailing similar conversations with Owens.

If the jury, now listening to the evidence at Glenville, shall declare Mrs. Atkinson guilty, what will Governor Atkinson do? Will he let the law take its course, or will he defy his own oath of office and misuse the pardoning power?

Gentle reader, what would you do if you were Governor Atkinson, of West Virginia?

being shaken on any vital points.

Mrs. Atkinson was cheerful during the trial, though the evidence against her was extremely strong. She seems to be sure of her acquittal and calmly bids her friends to wait for her side of the case before passing individual judgment. Her case received a blow, however, when the Grand Jury listened to testimony bearing on the crime charged against Mrs. Atkinson, and at the conclusion indicted Joshua P. Owens, charged with being accessory to the forgeries said to have been committed.

On Thursday two witnesses gave evidence going to show that Governor Atkinson's wife, formerly Mrs. Camden, had either forged or agreed to forge letters and receipts by which she would have been able to cheat the heirs of her late husband. By ante-dating letters and receipts it would have appeared that Mr. Camden had sold tracts of land just prior to his death, and that his health had prevented him from recording the deeds. By this means she could get the money for the land and the heirs would not get the bequests.

The last witness of the afternoon was the most telling, and his testimony produced a decided sensation. This was L. L. D. He was asked to relate any conversation he may have had with Mrs. Atkinson subsequent to Judge Camden's death. He said:

"I went down to Clarksburg to see Mrs. Camden about three tracts of land, and she said she could help me get the land. She said, 'You write a letter and date it back in Judge Camden's lifetime addressed to him and we can get the land easily.' I told her I did not like to do that kind of business. She said she could give me receipts against the tract of land showing so much paid on them; that the receipts would be dated back in Camden's lifetime."

He was then asked: "What part of the conversation did she ask you not to divulge?"

He answered: "That part about the letters and receipts."

The State says it has other witnesses to corroborate this testimony.

John Norris, an aged blind man, said that shortly after the death of Judge Camden he had a conversation with Joshua Owens in which the latter said that he had just returned from Mrs. Camden's home at Clarksburg, and had fully arranged matters with regard to his land, and that Mrs. Camden had given him a receipt far in excess of the purchase price of the land. These are the receipts that are alleged to have been forged by Mrs. Atkinson and Owens.

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Gentle Reader, What Would You Do If You Were Gov. Atkinson

The Journal Will Give \$100 for the Best Answer to This Perplexing Question.